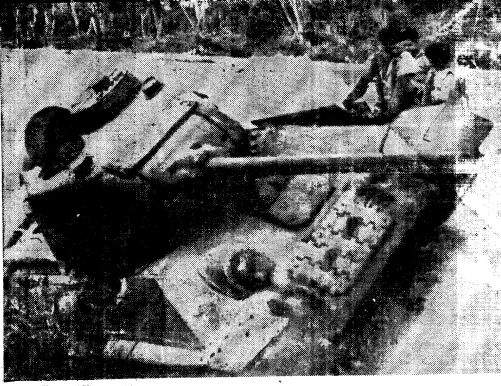


Tells of Two Days of Fighting on Cuban Beachhead

Participant Says Invaders Met Little Resistance at First, Then Were Attacked by Planes, Tanks



UPI reporter JAMES WHELAN listens as MANUEL PENABAZ points out a ship where he landed in Cuba with rebel forces. Picture was taken in Miami after Penabaz's escape from Cuba on a raft.

Wrecked tank near beach where invaders landed. Cuban authorities claimed the tank was American; in Washington, United States Army tank experts identified it as a Russian T-34 with an 85-mm. gun.

This is the second of three dispatches by Cuban freedom fighter Manuel Penabaz, who on night from his diary. Penabaz escaped from Cuba with four other men on a raft and after nearly six days drift was picked up by an American freighter and landed in Corpus Christi, Tex., yesterday. He told his training in Guantánamo Bay, and the battle for the beachhead.

By JAMES WHELAN
Associated Press

APRIL 14—The flotilla is heading toward our destination. The entire world does not escape us. We are here, a trained and armed force, ready to strike.

I am writing this aboard our ship, the Atlantic of the Garcia Lines, a Cuban company. It is a floating scrap heap, a rusted Liberty ship that looks like it may be making its last voyage. Suddenly the lifeless decks of the ship have been covered by sleeping bags, with men clutching Garands and machine guns and mortars, and echoing to obscenities and curses.

The scenes of the past few hours flicker through my mind like a moving picture. When we left Retalhuleu (Guatemala) in seven transport planes this morning, none suspected that our destination was Nicaragua. Our group was made up of the Third Battalion, heavy mortars and chiefs of staff. All of us were bound for this ship, the Atlantic.

From the ship we can see the guard—our men, Nicaraguan police and soldiers—controlling the dock, the only one in this small town. Not only do they prevent anyone from entering, but they also prevent those on the ship from leaving.

Some of the first arrivals here managed to get ashore and "make the rounds" of the bars, and now practically everyone wants to do the same. But our leaders say no, and the sentries look like they mean to enforce it.

Five other ships in our flotilla can be seen scattered around the bay. It gives me a sensation of security to see these ships, knowing that there are hundreds of other men, ready as we are, to attack; knowing that never before in Latin America has an invasion force such as this been assembled. They say that about some of the ships are five modern tanks, aviation gasoline, bombs, guns—and the best trained force in Latin America. I feel sure of our victory. Besides, God is with us. We will win.

APRIL 15—We are still waiting.

Twice we have left port and called to the open sea, only to return at night to load more munitions and material. We have already been given a send-off by Anastasio Somoza, chief of the armed forces of Nicaragua. We went to the dock when we heard a commotion and saw a group of Nicaraguan officers on the dock. One stood out—tall and strong man with a "suspicious" face and easy smile and stars on his shoulder boards. He was among the ship. "It is Tachito, Tachito (nickname of Somoza)." Many applauded, but a priest alongside me said wryly, "They are leaving the democratic countries of America."

Many of the ships—there were three at docks—remained silent. (The passengers' faces reflected this.) It struck me that this is one of the concessions we must make to the Communist regime. It is a concession we must make to the Communist regime. It is a concession we must make to the Communist regime.

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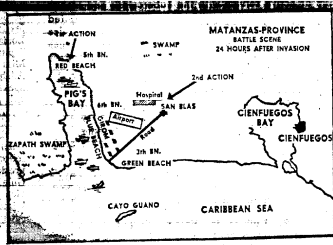
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Map of the battle area in Cuba.

Americans are landing, and no amount of persuasion changes their minds. During the first assault, the enemy suffered heavy casualties and retreated without resistance. The first to engage the enemy were the 180 men of Battalion Two under command of Eneldo Oliva, the most all-around officer in our force. Reinforced by 75-millimeter cannons and 50-mm. machine guns and a 4.2 mortar, they engaged a militia force of 15 or 20 trucks and six tanks, including Stalin tanks—a few hours after landing on Red Beach (the rebel designation for a sector of Girón beach).

Though the enemy force consisted of several thousand men, they were completely routed and we captured intact two tanks without any resistance—the militiamen apparently were simply frightened by our onslaught.

When we found we did not know how to drive the tanks, we had to burn them on the spot. Reports are streaming into our command post on Blue Beach and all the reports are encouraging—the enemy is disorganized and putting up a ridiculous resistance. Spirits are high in the command post.

APRIL 15—Early today Battalion Two pulled back to Blue Beach to consolidate our forces already too dispersed and far from supply lines. For the first time, enemy aviation appears very active. Only a single Sea Fury sank one of our ships with a rocket and strafed our troops. Now, the enemy planes—jets, B-26s and Sea Furies—are constantly bombing and strafing our landing strip only 500 meters from here.

We waited and wondered, but our planes did not appear, despite the constant reassurances that the skies would be ours. The civilians who live in the small town of Girón Beach in the midst of the landing area huddled terrified in their houses during the bombing. Many we had already installed in a social club located in the middle of Blue Beach. I have my hands full looking out for the approximately 100 men we hired at five pesos apiece to unload the boats—the boats came only once anyway so the only problem is to find shelter for them.

Everyone keeps asking us: "Where are the Americans? I don't see any Americans here." They are convinced that the

the battalion—its 180 men and all of its equipment—is a reverse for us. I can't imagine what happened to Montero because I have dealt often with him and know him to be a capable and valiant officer. Nonetheless, this is what they tell me.

During the afternoon, a jet fighter burst from the clouds and started strafing us and contrived its fire on a jeep which San Roman was driving along the coastal road. Luckily, he managed to escape, diving under his jeep. But before flying off, the jet killed one of our men in the command post and injured another named Morin.

News reaches us of a battle in a town called San Blas, 11 miles inland. The front was defended by airborne troops and the armored battalion. Four of the armored cars belonging to the latter battalion were lost in the sinking of one of the ships. Roberto San Roman was backing them up with 4.2 mortars.

The enemy threw Stalin tanks against our troops there. A force commanded by Montero Diaz, was rushed into the area to replace the armored battalion. It was a raw battalion made up mostly of badly-trained men. The paratroopers suffered heavy losses but could not be replaced and were on the verge of exhaustion.

That night, we went to the beach to signal with lanterns in the absurd hope that our ships, which we thought were still lying a mile off the coast, would send us the equipment we so badly needed. I was so tired I fell asleep on a reef with the lantern still in my hand.

Young San Roman, Josema and myself remained on the reef practically all night long. San Roman was so desperate that finally he jumped into a launch and said he was going to look for the ships. I pleaded with him and tried to hold him back and told him it was crazy to attempt it in the middle of the night, and besides the ships probably already had gone. Garcia Montes (ex-Cuban Ambassador in Japan) tried to help San Roman get the launch started, but they were not able. When I awoke in the morning, they were already gone.

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Tomorrow—The escape and the cause.

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